It’s a mild Saturday night, the evening before Mother’s Day. I should be home with the mother of my three kids, but I’m standing on a line in front of New York City’s Cinema Village at 9:30 p.m. Why? At 11:30 p.m., I’m going to see a free FANGORIA-sponsored screening of the new sci-fi/horror film SPLICE, starring PREDATORS’ Adrien Brody and DAWN OF THE DEAD’s Sarah Polley. Attending will be none other than the film’s director, Vincenzo Natali (the man behind CUBE and CYPHER). So I am really pumped.

To my surprise, there are already about 15 people on the SPLICE line when I turn up. So that makes me feel pretty good, because the movie hasn’t gotten much promotion as of yet (it opens June 4 from Warner Bros.). These are die-hard genre fans. Amongst the group are the prerequisite teenagers who probably dream of working in films of this type, plus a few people with suits and ties on. After a few minutes, some of my friends come out of nowhere, and it’s a great experience standing in line with my old buddies, as well as new ones I’ve just made. We all have a fun time talking up movies of all types. These Fango screenings are a way of bonding for us…a way of knowing we’re not alone in our love of the genre.

At about 11 or so, the doors open and we are let in once our names are double-checked on the RSVP list. I don’t know about anyone else, but I *love* being on a RSVP list. A group of us sit together in one row and chat amiably amongst ourselves about how the film will play. After everyone is seated, the film is briefly introduced by FANGORIA magazine editor emeritus Tony Timpone and director Natali. Tony has already seen SPLICE and tells us we will love it. At that point, the lights go down.

SPLICE is the story of scientists Clive (Adrien Brody) and Elsa (Sarah Polley), who have managed to create a living organism in their lab. The lifeform reminds me of the giant maggot featured in David Cronenberg’s THE FLY, just a whole lot ickier. The duo work for a company that wants to use their research to create cures for various diseases and the like. Their DNA

manipulation to create a new being is hailed as a breakthrough by their bosses, and they’re told to prepare a demonstration for investors, but the presentation turns out to be a disaster—a wonderfully bloody disaster. (There isn’t any splatter in SPLICE up to this point; I like my movies gory, so sue me.) Of course, the two scientists are told to shut their operation down, but Elsa convinces Clive to try splicing human DNA into their manmade creature in its egg form. Elsa reasons, “What’s the worst that could happen?”

Suffice it to say, their little experiment doesn’t die, as Elsa at one point thinks it has. Something has been born—something not quite animal or human. Named Dren, the creature grows at an alarming rate and becomes quite alluring in a very uncomfortable way. Dren learns quickly, although she never really speaks; she makes sounds like Gizmo from Joe Dante’s classic GREMLINS.

I really can’t talk more about the movie without giving away spoilers, but I will say that SPLICE is a supremely satisfying experience, and the ending is just right. Think of it as a far more intelligent version of SPECIES. Brody’s performance is pitch-perfect; ditto Polley’s. As Dren, Delphine Chaneac not only emerges as a wonderful actress, but her beauty shows through the bizarre makeup and CG manipulation. Said FX lead to two of the more “holy cow” scenes in the movie (no spoilers, remember?).

Fango’s post-screening Q&A with Natali is eye-opening in terms of revealing what it took to get SPLICE produced and distributed. Natali does not look the way I pictured him; he seems like an ordinary guy who just happens to make movies for a living. And it’s a relief that he responds to our questions just like an ordinary guy who makes films for a living would. He is polite and very detailed in answering all queries asked of him, displaying a great sense of humor in the process. I have two to throw his way: First, did he see the similarity between SPLICE and SPECIES, however tenuous it may be? Second, not only does Dren sound a lot like Gizmo, but Brody actually drives a Gremlin car in the film. Inside joke? Natali laughs heartily and claims that people have mentioned the similarities between his film and SPECIES, but he never really noticed it. SPLICE is a far more serious film, anyway. As for the GREMLINS connection, the car wasn’t put in the film on purpose. He then explains the process by which they figured out how Dren should sound, and smiles broadly while explaining the complicated creation of her voice (a combination of many elements).

After the discussion, we approach Natali to tell him in person how much we loved SPLICE, as well as his first movie CUBE. If you haven’t seen CUBE yet, please do yourself a favor and do so—it’s brilliant. (Avoid all the sequels, though; Natali had nothing to do with them, and it shows). The Toronto native is a genuinely nice fellow, and I wish him big success with SPLICE. I hope it doesn’t get lost in the tumult of summer blockbusters, like many smaller films have in years past.

We leave the theater, and there’s a bit of a nip in the air. It’s close to 2 a.m. now, and we have long rides home. But we all take the time to exchange numbers/e-mail addresses and promise to see each other again as soon as possible. I walk down the block to my car as a slight wind blows discarded newspapers around my ankles. I smile to myself thinking about the great time I had and the new friends I made at SPLICE tonight. Thanks, Fango.

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